

I'm excited to be speaking before the Bloom Township Democrats. And I'm glad to see so many Democrats here -- given the Republican history in the township.

When I was first elected to Congress nine years ago, Bloom was a Republican stronghold. As I recall, virtually every state and county official from the township was a Republican. As recently as 20 years ago, Bloom was so Republican that GOP Presidential candidates came here to kick off their campaigns.

But, we're glad to report that's all changed. Bloom is now a Democratic stronghold.

Today, all the state and county officials from Bloom are Democrats. All your federal officials will soon be Democrats. And I am confident that in 12 days Bloom will overwhelmingly support John Kerry for President.

We all have an awesome responsibility on Nov. 2, and that responsibility is to vote.

We can vote for the people who have mis-led this nation for the past four years -- during which time our nation lost 1.6 million jobs; 5 million more Americans lost their health care; a \$5 trillion budget surplus turned into a \$3 trillion deficit; and we spent \$140 billion in Iraq to create more terrorists instead of less.

Fortunately we have a better choice. We can -- indeed we must -- vote for leaders who will restore hope and create jobs; provide health care for families; stop giving tax breaks to millionaires; and restore American credibility around the world.

I will speak more about some national issues in a minute, but first I'd like to update you on some

important local projects.

*** THE AIRPORT**

Folks, we are closer than ever to building the third airport, which we have named the Abraham Lincoln National Airport. The airspace and location have been approved by the FAA. The land is being purchased by the State. The Governor says he prefers our plan over all others. And we have two proven, world-class airport developers who are under contract to build and finance -- with their own money -- the \$200 million inaugural project. LCOR and SNC-Lavalin have built some of the finest airports in the world, and they are willing, able, and eager to invest in the Southland.

I talk frequently about the airport with Governor Blagojevich -- who, by the way, is another successful Democrat thanks in part to strong support from Bloom Township. I expect within the next few months that the Governor will name our commission as the state's official co-sponsor for the airport.

As you know, under our plan, this airport is financed with private capital at no cost or risk to local taxpayers or communities. I want to take this opportunity to thank the many municipalities for supporting the airport and for joining our airport commission.

(Please give yourselves a round of applause.)

One final thought on the airport: While we had tried to work with Will County officials in the past, given recent headlines about corruption among Will County Republicans, I am grateful that they decided to go their own way about a year ago. Sometimes God works in mysterious ways.

*** THE HO-CHUNK ENTERTAINMENT CENTER**

Like the airport. I remain optimistic about the Ho-Chunk Development in Lynwood. The Ho-Chunks have proposed a magnificent entertainment complex, shopping center and casino that will create a long-overdue "destination point" for tourists in the Southland.

Please know that gaming was never my first choice for economic development. But, this 432-acre complex includes a luxury hotel, water park, amphitheatre, restaurants, retail outlets, spa, sports complex and Native American museum.

As a first-class resort, it will attract tourists and conventioners to our area, and create 5,000 new jobs with good wages and family benefits. It also will generate \$78 million a year in payroll taxes for the state and local governments, and another \$90 million a year in revenue sharing funds for the state, local communities and local schools.

* **LOCAL PROJECTS**

Since going to Washington, I have secured more than \$333 million in federal assistance to improve the quality of life throughout the 2nd District. That money has been used to improve schools, expand health care, create jobs, clean the environment, and rebuild infrastructure, among other things.

On Monday, I will break ground for a new flood retention reservoir along Deer Creek to eliminate flooding in Ford Heights and neighboring communities. That \$8 million project was spearheaded by my office and will be completed in cooperation with the US Army Corps of Engineers; the State, County, MWRD and the Village of Ford Heights.

Now, I will discuss a few **national issues**...

Friends, here is our reality...

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IRAQ

President Bush and the Republicans in Congress insist that down is up, that bad is good and that ignorance is strength. We rushed to war without a plan to win the peace. We've spent more than \$140 billion and lost more than 1,000 lives in Iraq. We're bearing 90% of the costs and 90% of coalition casualties.

But as the 9/11 Commission and the latest weapons inspector report make clear, we were attacked by Al Qaeda based in Afghanistan on September 11th, not Saddam Hussein in Iraq. There was no connection between the 9/11 attack and Iraq and yet the President took us to war against the wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time. He shaded the truth, hyped the evidence, and misled the American people. Iraq was no imminent threat. THIS war is a war of choice, not necessity. It was ill-conceived, ill-managed and ill-timed.

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ECONOMY

The President's fiscal recklessness - aided and abetted by an irresponsible Republican-controlled Congress - has turned record surpluses into record deficits. They shore up the wealthy, but shortchange the working. They provide tax breaks for those who need them least and cut assistance for those who need it most. And so, the gap between rich and poor grows wider.

More than 1 million people fell out of the middle class into poverty in 2003, with an increase of over 4 million people living in poverty since the beginning of the Bush Administration.

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HEALTH

President Bush promised to make health care more affordable. But he broke it. The number of uninsured Americans has risen dramatically.

Forty-five million Americans now lack basic health insurance, five million more than when President Bush took office.

Health insurance premiums have risen by double digits for four years in a row.

Prescription drugs have gotten more expensive, not less. Insurers are cutting back on prescription drug coverage, shifting more costs onto patients.

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EDUCATION

The Bush Administration and its Republican allies in Congress have led an all out attack against programs that provide equal opportunity for our children.

They've **shortchanged** public education (the No Child Left Behind Act) by a total of \$27 billion in the last four years, \$9.5 billion in this year alone.

They've **slashed** funding for student loans and Pell Grants at a time when the price of college has gone up by 35 percent, rising faster than both inflation and family income. .

They've **sliced** \$316 million from vocational education and community colleges, and have failed to increase job training and employment programs.

Friends, those are the realities. Now, let me tell you about the possibilities. Let me tell you about my vision and the vision of the Democratic party.

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IRAQ

The Democrats have a practical plan to win the peace in Iraq and bring our troops home. However, we must realize our mistakes, and we must change course in Iraq. Having gone to war, we cannot afford to fail at peace.

We must rebuild and lead strong alliances so that others will share the burden with us in Iraq and elsewhere.

We must train Iraqis because they must be responsible for their own security.

We must move forward with reconstruction because that's an important way to stop the spread of terror.

We must help Iraqis achieve a viable government, because it is up to them to run their own country.

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ECONOMY Democrats have a plan to create millions of new jobs, to reward companies for creating jobs, and provide middle class tax relief to grow the economy. The measure of a strong economy is a growing middle-class where every American has a chance to work and an opportunity to succeed, and it's time to bring opportunities back to America.

As president, John Kerry along with 218 Democrats in the House, will eliminate breaks that reward companies for outsourcing your jobs, and cut taxes for businesses that create jobs here in America.

John Kerry and a Democratic Congress will cut the deficit in half during his first four years in office. We will end corporate welfare as we know it, roll back the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, lower middle-class taxes and impose a real cap to keep spending in check. And when Democrats put forward new ideas, we'll tell you how we're going to pay for it.

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HEALTH

Democrats are fighting for a health care system that provides coverage and protection for ALL Americans.

Democrats are fighting for a Patients' Bill of Rights that hold insurers accountable for providing necessary services and high quality health care.

Democrats are proposing a clear and simple plan that provides a real prescription drug benefit, and empowers Medicare to negotiate prices with drug companies so that those who need help the most will be guaranteed access to affordable prescription drugs nationwide.

John Kerry and a Democratic majority will work to provide a tax credit to help small businesses - who currently employ over 60 percent of uninsured workers - offer health coverage to their employees.

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EDUCATION

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When Democrats control Congress, we'll make sure to fully fund No Child Left Behind, not just talk about it. We will also recruit teachers for high-need schools, especially in subject areas like math and science.

You will see Democrats working with schools to invest in anti-dropout efforts like offering mentoring in middle school, shrinking class sizes, and strengthening the high school curriculum. Not just imposing a list of tests just so we can say we tested.

In the last three years, college tuition has risen by 35 percent. Democrats know that we can give those young people and their families a break. John Kerry proposes simplifying the student aid

application process, and a tax credit on up to \$4000 of tuition for four years of college.

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VOTING - "I'VE GOT THE POWER!"

But how do we move from this vision to reality? While it's a giant step in the right direction, it will take more than electing John Kerry and John Edwards to the White House. To make these changes, we must change who is in charge of Congress. We must build a Democratic coalition of the willing in the White House, the House of Representatives and in the Senate.

USE your power! In the 2000 presidential election, only about 51% of the nation's eligible voters actually went to the polls. If we believe that the right to vote is worth fighting and dying for abroad, then we must protect democracy here at home. It is worth an hour of our time on November 2nd to make sure we have a truly representative government here at home.

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EVERY VOTE COUNTS

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We all know the 2000 presidential election came down to just a few votes in Florida. But 2000 wasn't the only close race. Kennedy beat Nixon in 1960 by 118,000 votes---less than one vote per precinct. Kennedy gave us a New Vision and The New Frontier. In 1948, Lyndon Johnson won a seat in the Senate by 87 votes. He went on to become the president who signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Open Housing Act of 1968. He also appointed Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court, and declared the War on Poverty.

So EVERY vote counts! If you want better schools -- VOTE! If you want more teachers -- VOTE! If you want more scholarships -- VOTE! If you want better health care -- VOTE! If you want more affordable housing -- VOTE! If you want to protect social security -- VOTE! If you want better jobs -- VOTE! If you want to raise the minimum wage -- VOTE! If you want a brighter future -- VOTE!

VOTE TO LEAVE NO AMERICAN BEHIND!